

SUPPORTING AMERICA'S FARMERS AND CONSERVING AMERICA'S LAND

Today's Presidential Action

- Today, President Bush visited the Katzenmeyer Farm in Le Sueur, Minnesota, to highlight his continued commitment to improving the environment and the strong conservation ethic of America's farmers and sportsmen – by announcing three important new conservation initiatives that will help protect wildlife, water, and precious land resources.
- These new conservation efforts will further support the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) largest conservation program on private lands, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). CRP is a successful, 20-year old, voluntary program that works with farmers and sportsmen to conserve environmentally sensitive land and provide habitat for waterfowl and birds.

Background on Today's Presidential Action

Originally authorized under the 1985 Farm Bill, CRP is a voluntary program sponsored by USDA that provides incentives to landowners to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and instead establish protective vegetative cover of grass, trees, or wildlife habitat. Since its inception in 1986, this program has helped reduce soil erosion by more than 40 percent and restored 1.8 million acres of critical wetlands. Since President Bush signed the historic 2002 Farm Bill, CRP has increased enrollment by 2.6 million acres, conserving a total of 34.8 million acres of environmentally sensitive land for wildlife habitat, riparian buffers, and soil protection. The 2002 Farm Bill provides more than \$40 billion over a decade to restore millions of acres of wetlands, protect habitats, conserve water, and improve streams and rivers near working farms and ranches. Today, President Bush announced three new efforts to strengthen conservation under CRP:

- **Strengthening the Environment by Expanding and Extending the Conservation Reserve Program:**
 - **Early Re-Enrollment and Extensions of CRP Contracts to Improve Environmental Benefits.** The President announced that USDA will offer early re-enrollment and contract extensions in order to improve the environmental benefits of the existing CRP acreage. The President directed the Secretary of Agriculture to initiate a plan for maintaining and expanding the benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program in the future, working closely with farmers, sportsmen, wildlife groups, conservation leaders, communities, and other interested individuals.
 - ✓ At present, 16 million acres under CRP contract are scheduled to expire in 2007. Another 6 million acres would follow in 2008, 4 million in 2009, and 2 million in 2010. Today's action by the President will make sure these farmlands stay protected. A request for public comment on various aspects of CRP will be published in the Federal Register in early August 2004. This action underscores the Bush Administration's commitment to full enrollment of CRP up to 39.2 million acres and to strong conservation on working farms.

- **CRP General Sign-Up to Help America's Farmers.** The President also announced a general sign-up of 800,000 acres under CRP. The sign-up will occur from Aug. 30 through Sept. 24, 2004, at local USDA/FSA offices. Today's announcement further demonstrates President Bush's commitment to helping our Nation's farmers maintain a strong agricultural economy while meeting their commitments to the environment. Under the 2002 Farm Bill, signed by President Bush in May 2002, USDA is authorized to enroll up to 39.2 million acres of farmland in CRP. Many of the lands protected under CRP serve as stopping points for waterfowl during their migration.
- **Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative to Strengthen Wildlife Habitats.** The President today announced a new initiative to increase the population of the northern bobwhite quail by 750,000 birds annually. The CRP Northern Bobwhite Quail Habitat Initiative creates automatic enrollment of 250,000 additional acres of grass buffers on farms. CRP has already strengthened wildlife habitat that has increased populations of birds, fish, and many other wildlife species. In fact, studies show that the increase of the duck population by 2.1 million each year is attributable to CRP. Pheasant populations are at or near record high levels in many Midwestern states.
- **Non-Floodplain Wetlands Restoration Initiative for Critical Environmental Benefits.** Today, the President announced the Non-Floodplain Wetland Restoration Initiative to encourage landowners to enroll 250,000 acres of large wetland complexes and playa lakes located outside the 100-year floodplain. Restoring these wetlands will provide critical environmental benefits including:
 - Provide vital habitat for many wildlife species, such as ducks, pheasants, and sandhill cranes;
 - Filter runoff, recharge groundwater supplies, and protect drinking water; and
 - Reduce downstream flooding.

Other Highlights of the President's Conservation Agenda

- **Improving Wetlands.** On Earth Day 2004, the President announced an aggressive new national goal – moving beyond a policy of “no-net-loss” of wetlands – to restore, improve, and protect at least 3 million wetland acres over the next 5 years in order to increase overall wetland acres and quality. To meet this goal, the President called on Congress to pass his FY 2005 Budget request, which includes \$4.4 billion for conservation programs. In December 2002, President Bush signed legislation reauthorizing the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) for five years.
- **Healthy Forests Initiative.** On December 3, 2003, President Bush signed legislation implementing key provisions of his Healthy Forests Initiative. The President's Healthy Forests Initiative is helping restore the health and vitality of forests and rangelands. The Initiative also helps reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires, which benefits communities and wildlife habitats.
- **Great Lakes Restoration.** In May 2004, President Bush established the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force to address environmental and natural resource issues of national concern and better coordinate the region's sustainable development and restoration. The President's FY 2005 budget includes an unprecedented \$45 million for the Great Lakes Legacy Program, almost five times the 2004 level of funding. These additional funds will allow EPA, in conjunction with its community partners, to begin remediating contaminated sediments at six sites. Sediment remediation will help keep toxics such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and heavy metals from entering the food chain, where they could cause adverse effects on human health and the environment.